DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 101 JC 020 168

TITLE	Los Angeles Community College District: It Has Improved Its Procedures for Selecting College Presidents.
INSTITUTION	California State Office of the Auditor General, Sacramento.
PUB DATE	2000-08-00
NOTE	38p.
AVAILABLE FROM	California State Auditor, Bureau of State Audits, 555 Capitol Mall, Suite 300, Sacramento, CA 95814 ($3). Tel: 916-445-0255; Web site: http://www.bsa.ca.gov/bsa/.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Selection; *Audits (Verification); *College Presidents; *Community Colleges; *Educational Policy; Leadership; *Search Committees (Personnel); State Regulation; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*Los Angeles Community College District CA

ABSTRACT

This auditor's report reviews the procedures used by the Los Angeles Community College District (California) to select its college presidents. In September 1999 the district revised its procedures by designating a person who is solely responsible for ensuring compliance with board procedure, establishing timelines for the selection process, and having a greater proportion of selection committee representatives appointed from the campus community. These revisions have improved the accountability of the process and provide for greater community involvement. The district has been slow to replace interim presidents, and in four instances since 1995, the district had an interim president at a college longer than state regulations permit. The district's costs to select college presidents have increased significantly (from $6,200 to $34,000 per search) but are consistent with costs incurred by other districts. Recommended improvements include adopting Community College League of California-recommended practices currently not in use (e.g., establishing a budget), archiving selection documents to demonstrate compliance with all required procedures and to memorialize the process for subsequent searches, performing selection procedures promptly to avoid having interim presidents longer than regulation allows, and developing a system to track all costs associated with each presidential search. (Includes one table and three figures.) (KP)

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Los Angeles Community College District:

It Has Improved Its Procedures for Selecting College Presidents

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CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

ELAINE M. HOWLE
STATE AUDITOR

STEVEN M. HENDRICKSON
CHIEF DEPUTY STATE AUDITOR

August 29, 2000 99134

The Governor of California
President pro Tempore of the Senate
Speaker of the Assembly
State Capitol
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor and Legislative Leaders:

As requested by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, the Bureau of State Audits presents its audit report concerning the process the Los Angeles Community College District (district) uses for selecting the presidents for its nine campuses.

This report concludes that in the past the district followed its Board of Trustees (board) selection procedures, which were generally consistent and allowed for involvement by the college community. Nevertheless, the district did not always hire presidents after it conducted searches. In 1999, the district's board rejected the list of finalists forwarded to it by the search committees at Mission and Harbor Colleges and chose instead to appoint interim presidents. The district subsequently revised its selection procedures to increase quality controls and community involvement and conducted new searches that resulted in appointments of presidents at these colleges in 2000. Although the revised procedures are similar to those we identified as "recommended practices" and to those used by some of the 18 California community college districts we surveyed, we found several conditions relating to the selection of college presidents that can be improved. We also concluded that the district's costs to conduct a search process are not out of line with those of other districts.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine M. Howle

ELAINE M. HOWLE
State Auditor

Los Angeles Community College District:

It Has Improved Its Procedures for Selecting College Presidents

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SUMMARY

Audit Highlights . . .

Our review of the procedures used by the Los Angeles Community College District (district) to select its college presidents disclosed that:

- ☑ *In the past, the district followed procedures that were generally consistent and allowed for involvement by the college community.*
- ☑ *Its revised procedures improve the accountability of the process and provide for greater community involvement.*
- ☑ *The procedures are similar to those used by some of the community college districts we surveyed and to recommended practices in California.*
- ☑ *The district has been slow to replace interim presidents. In four instances since 1995, the district had an interim president at a college longer than state regulations permit.*
- ☑ *District costs to select college presidents have increased significantly, but are not out of line with costs other districts have incurred.*

RESULTS IN BRIEF

Between November 1994 and July 1999, the Los Angeles Community College District (district) conducted 10 searches for college presidents at eight of its nine campuses. In conducting these 10 searches, search committees followed procedures that were generally consistent and allowed for involvement by the college community. After 3 of these searches, however, the board of trustees (board) rejected the list of finalists and chose instead to appoint interim presidents. Although it is possible that the district's failure to hire a president in these three instances was related to the selection procedures the board approved, the failures could also be due to a variety of other reasons. For example, the district had serious financial problems during some of this time, and these problems were widely known. In fact, the district's independent financial auditors warned in 1997 that the district might not remain financially viable, and the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges expressed alarm regarding the situation in January 1998, citing concerns about administrative stability and fiscal health. As a result, we believe that some highly qualified potential candidates may have chosen not to apply for the positions, especially if salaries, benefits, and working conditions were not competitive. The district subsequently revised its selection procedures and conducted new searches that resulted in appointments of presidents at two of these colleges—Mission College and Harbor College—in May and June 2000, respectively. It is now initiating a search for a president for the third college, Southwest College.

The new procedures, revised in September 1999, improve the accountability of the process by designating a person who is solely responsible for ensuring compliance with board procedures and by establishing timelines for the selection process. The new procedures also provide for greater community involvement by, for example, having a greater proportion of representatives appointed from the campus community on the selection committee, with fewer board and district appointees. These procedures are similar to those used by some of the 18 California community college districts we surveyed, and they also closely parallel procedures recently developed by the

Community College League of California (league), a nonprofit corporation whose voluntary membership consists of the 72 local community college districts in California.

Some of the district's revised selection practices differ from the league's recommended practices in minor ways. For example, the district does not have a policy requiring that a budget be established for the search process. In addition, we noted certain other aspects of the district's selection process that could be improved. For instance, the district did not fully document its compliance with the procedures of its board on several occasions, although based on our review of other information and discussions with district staff and others involved in the search, we believe that the district was in fact compliant in these situations. Also, in four instances since 1995, the district was slow to complete its search and had an interim president at a college for a period longer than the one year that the California Code of Regulations permits without an extension from the Chancellor of California Community Colleges.

Finally, we found that the district's costs to select college presidents have increased significantly under the revised procedures, from an average of $6,200 for each of the three searches ended in 1999 to an average of almost $34,000 for each search ended in 2000. This increase is primarily due to search consultants' fees and greater travel expenses for candidates. Although the district does not have a system to track the costs of individual searches, we requested the information and compiled these costs as part of this audit. The use of a consultant, at a fee of $20,000 per search, is the single most significant reason for the increase in costs associated with the selection process, but most of the search committee and board members with whom we spoke felt that the services a consultant provided were of value. While the district's costs to conduct a selection process are not out of line with those of other districts, these increased costs make it more important that the district does not conduct a selection process and then fail to appoint a president.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the process through which it selects presidents for its colleges, the district should take the following actions:

- Consider adopting league-recommended practices it is not currently using, such as establishing a budget.

- Archive selection documents to demonstrate compliance with all required procedures and to memorialize the process for subsequent searches.

- Perform selection procedures promptly to avoid having interim presidents serve longer than the California Code of Regulations allows.

- Develop a system to track all costs associated with each presidential search.

DISTRICT COMMENTS

The district stated that it believes our audit report is generally accurate, and that the recommendations it contains are reasonable. ■

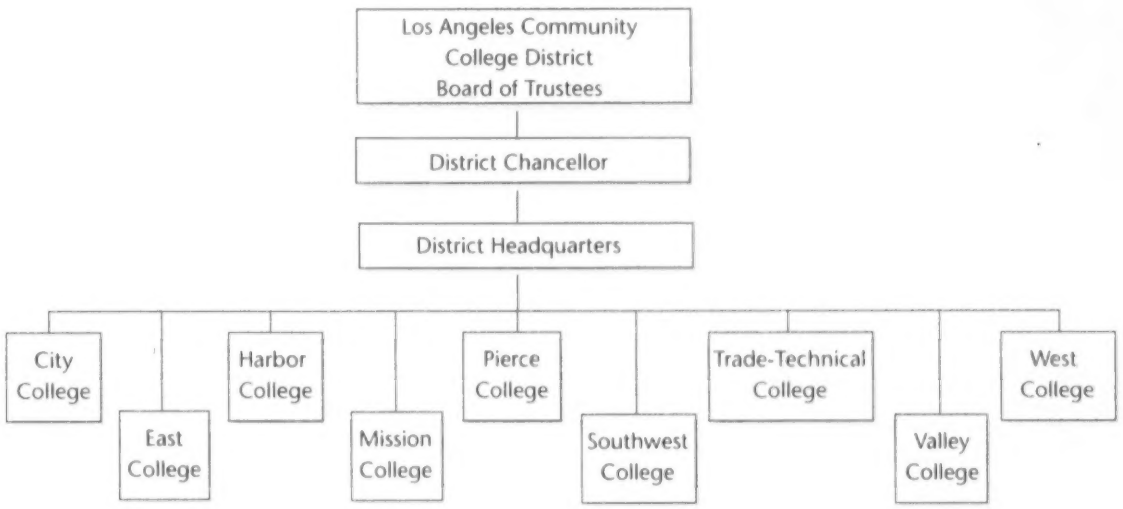
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The Los Angeles Community College District (district) is the largest in the country, providing educational services for approximately 100,000 students in an area of 463 square miles. The district is one of 72 in the California community college system and is one of 20 in the system that have multiple campuses. As shown in the Figure, the district is made up of a central headquarters office and nine colleges.

FIGURE

Organization of the Los Angeles Community College District



The responsibility for administration of the district is divided between a board of trustees (board) and a district chancellor. The eight-member board of trustees governs the district as a whole, setting policy for the nine colleges. The district's voters elect seven of the board members, who serve four-year terms, while students annually elect the eighth, who acts only in an advisory role. The district chancellor, a board appointee, implements the board's directives and oversees the colleges. The district

chancellor also oversees the district headquarters, which is responsible for providing central services and for establishing the day-to-day regulations that govern the district's activities.

In addition, a college president administers each campus directly, managing that college's budget, its delivery of instructional and student services, its community relations, and its personnel programs. It is the duty of the nine college presidents, who answer directly to the district chancellor, to ensure that the individual campuses run effectively and that they appropriately follow district policy in their operations.

At the state level, the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges (state chancellor's office) and its board of governors provide leadership to California's community colleges, establishing statewide policies and overseeing some educational and fiscal activities. However, the state chancellor's office does not provide direction to the community college districts for practices to follow in the selection of college presidents, which is the subject of this report.

CONCERNS HAVE BEEN RAISED OVER THE BOARD'S REJECTION OF RECOMMENDED FINALISTS

The district has not always been able to promptly attract candidates and hire presidents at its nine campuses. Each of the district's colleges has had an interim president at some point in the last 10 years, either because of unexpected departures of presidents or because of delays in completing searches.

The district's difficulty in attracting strong candidates has resulted in three instances since July 1995 in which the board exercised its prerogative to reject the list of finalists recommended by the search committee, choosing instead to renew the search process. The last two rejections occurred within one month of each other—in June 1999 at Harbor College and July 1999 at Mission College. Concern over the failure to appoint one of the proposed candidates as well as questions about community involvement in the selection process gave rise to the request for this audit.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The Joint Legislative Audit Committee (committee) requested that the Bureau of State Audits (bureau) conduct a study of the selection process used by the board of the district for appointing college presidents. The committee requested that the bureau determine the following:

- The consistency of the evaluation procedures used by the district.
- The extent to which the district complied with its own policies and procedures.
- The degree to which the community was involved in the selection process.
- The comparability of the district's presidential selection procedures to generally accepted procedures.
- The reasonableness of the costs incurred by the district in its process of selecting a president.

To gain an understanding of the district's responsibilities in selecting a president, we reviewed relevant state laws and regulations as well as district policies. In addition, we interviewed district employees and the staff of the state chancellor's office.

To determine the consistency of the district's evaluation procedures and its compliance with board directives, we reviewed the 12 presidential selection processes that occurred between November 1994 and June 2000, comparing the steps in each process to the board's directives. In addition, we examined district documents and interviewed district staff regarding the issue of compliance with board requirements.

To determine the degree to which district residents and college faculty, staff, and students were involved in the selection process, we interviewed search committee members and evaluated the composition of the 12 committees.

To identify commonly used procedures for presidential searches, we surveyed 18 community college districts of various sizes located throughout the State. In the surveys, we asked the districts for the procedures they use to fill the position of college president. We also spoke with representatives of a number of community college associations to determine the recommended practices for filling such positions.

To evaluate whether the district's procedures are consistent with generally accepted procedures, we compared the main steps in the district's procedures to those used by other districts and to practices recommended by the Community College League of California. We also identified district procedures unrelated to recommended practices that could be improved.

Finally, we examined consultant, travel, and advertising costs incurred by the district during the 1999 and 2000 searches and compared them with costs obtained from the districts we surveyed to determine if the district's costs were reasonable. The district was unable to provide, and we did not determine, the costs related to the time spent by committee members on the selection process. ■

AUDIT RESULTS

THE DISTRICT FOLLOWED CONSISTENT PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION PROCEDURES, EVEN THOUGH THIS DID NOT ALWAYS RESULT IN APPOINTMENTS

Between November 1994 and July 1999, the Los Angeles Community College District (district) conducted 10 searches for presidents at eight of its nine colleges. For 3 of these searches, the district's board of trustees (board) opted not to appoint any of the candidates recommended by the committees responsible for conducting the searches. Although the board separately approved procedures to be followed for each of these 10 presidential search processes, the procedures were generally consistent among all of the searches and allowed for community involvement in the search committees, and we concluded that the district followed the board's procedures. We were not able to determine whether the district's failure to hire a president in the three instances was related to the selection procedures the board approved.

The starting dates of the 10 searches conducted between November 1994 and July 1999 were as follows:

- 1994: Valley and East Los Angeles Colleges
- 1995: Pierce, Mission, and Trade Technical Colleges
- 1996: Southwest College
- 1997: City College
- 1998: Harbor and Pierce Colleges
- 1999: Mission College

The district did not hire a president for Southwest College after its search, which ended in 1997. The board's overall assessment was that, in view of the task at hand, none of the candidates' backgrounds and experience was a good fit. The college has since continued to operate with an interim president for reasons that will be discussed in more detail later. The district did not hire presidents for Mission and Harbor Colleges after their searches ended in 1999, citing the same reasons, and it

appointed interim presidents for these campuses in July and August 1999, respectively. The district subsequently renewed these two searches and in 2000 appointed presidents for both colleges.

Although the board separately approved the selection procedures used in each of these 10 searches, the procedures were generally similar to one another. The procedures the board approved for the Mission College search were typical of those in use before September 1999:

Despite the fact that presidents were not always appointed after a search, the procedures approved by the board for each of the 10 searches were similar to each other and provided for community involvement.

1. The district office reviews all applications to ensure that candidates meet the minimum qualifications.

2. A search committee, consisting of 17 voting members, is chosen. The college community selects 11 members while the board and chancellor select 6. In addition, an affirmative action officer from another college serves as a nonvoting member.

3. The search committee conducts a national search for the president as rapidly as possible consistent with attracting a large and diverse pool of qualified candidates.

4. The committee reviews the application materials of all eligible candidates and selects a minimum of six candidates to interview.

5. The committee interviews the invited candidates and selects a minimum of three candidates to recommend to the district chancellor, in unranked order.

6. The district chancellor may indicate his or her preferred candidate for the position when submitting all the recommended candidates to the board for consideration.

Despite overall similarities, we did find some minor differences in the selection procedures approved for each search. For example, two search committees had 19 voting members instead of 17. In addition, the board explicitly required the district to seek the input of the college faculty senate in developing position announcements and advertising content in only four of the

selection processes.[1] However, these differences are fairly minor and seem unlikely to have had a strong impact on the search processes as a whole.

Both the college communities and the residential communities in which the colleges are situated were consistently involved in all 10 presidential searches. In each, the college community selected at least 11 of the 17 members voting on the search committee. Further, in the searches we reviewed, at least 2 of the committee members selected by the board were not directly affiliated with the board or the district but were instead residents of the community served by the college. As a result, at least 13 of the 17 voting members of each search committee were community representatives.

In a few instances, the district did not document its compliance with the board's procedures.

In each of the 10 searches, the district complied with the main procedures the board established. We did note a few minor instances in which the district did not appropriately document its compliance, but we were able to conclude that the procedures were followed based on interviews and corroborating evidence. For example, the district did not always document the search committees' recommendations of three candidates to the chancellor, in unranked order. However, key district staff and participants in the process confirmed that such recommendations had been made, and we also noted evaluation sheets and other paperwork used by the committees to determine their lists of finalists. In addition, for three of the selection processes we reviewed, we did not see any evidence of college community involvement in developing the announcement for the position of president as required by the board, but district staff assured us that the board permitted public comment by members of the college community in the board meeting at which the search was initiated and during subsequent board meetings. Also, they indicated that the district convened a small ad hoc committee from campus constituencies at the start of the process, to provide wording for the announcement.

Thus, based on our review of these searches, we found that the district's failure to hire presidents in three instances was neither the result of inconsistent procedures nor the result of noncompliance with those procedures. Although it is possible that the lack of success in these searches was related to the selection

[1] Although the board omitted this explicit requirement for the other six selection processes, a provision stipulated that the board could receive input from the college community regarding qualifications and experience required for presidential candidates.

procedures the board approved, other factors could also have been involved. For example, the district was in serious financial difficulty during some of this time, and its problems were widely known. In fact, the district's independent financial auditors warned in 1997 that the district might not remain financially viable, and the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges expressed alarm about the situation in January 1998, citing concerns about administrative stability and fiscal health. As a result, we believe that some highly qualified potential candidates may have chosen not to apply for the positions, especially if salaries, benefits, and working conditions were not competitive. Another factor could have been the rebounding economy in the State as a whole, which made attracting qualified candidates more difficult for some employers.

THE BOARD'S REVISED PROCEDURES IMPROVE THE SELECTION PROCESS BY INCREASING QUALITY CONTROLS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The district chancellor is now responsible for ensuring that the search complies with board rules.

In September 1999, after its decision not to appoint presidents at Mission and Harbor Colleges, the board amended its procedures for presidential searches by establishing standard, ongoing selection practices. In making its revisions, the board sought to increase quality control by designating the district chancellor as solely responsible for the selection process and by establishing a specific timeline for the search. It also hoped to expand the college community's involvement in the process, in part by increasing the percentage of community-selected members on the search committee.

Since then, the district has used the board's revised procedures to appoint presidents for Mission and Harbor Colleges in May and June 2000, respectively. According to our interviews with five board members and four members who were on both the 1999 and 2000 Mission College search committees, the revised procedures improved the search process.

The Revised Procedures Improve Quality Control

The revised procedures represent a significant change in quality control from presidential selection procedures of the past, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

A Comparison of the District's Past and Revised Presidential Selection Procedures

Written Requirements	Procedures Used Prior to September 1999	Procedures Used After September 1999
Board establishes timeline for process.		●
Selection procedures assign responsibility for overseeing the search to a single individual.		●
Selection procedures require a prompt nationwide search or recruitment with the goal of creating a qualified and diverse pool of candidates.	●	●
District chancellor develops a position announcement, including qualifications, after consultation with the college community.		●
District chancellor develops a recruitment and advertising plan that may include the use of a consultant. If a consultant is deemed necessary, the board selects from among two or three potential consultants.		●
Search committee is established with broad representation from the college and residential communities.	●	●
An affirmative action representative is appointed nonvoting advisor to the committee.	●	●
Committee members are responsible for maintaining confidentiality.		●
Board president and district chancellor provide their expectations at the first meeting of the search committee.		●
Search committee reviews application materials and interviews candidates.	●	●
After interviews, committee conducts background and reference checks.		●
Committee considers inviting candidates to open meetings on campus.		●
Committee recommends a list of finalists to the district chancellor, in unranked order.	●	●
District chancellor considers visits to the finalists' institutions.		●
District chancellor forwards finalists to the board along with his/her recommendations, if any.	●	●
Board may conduct further background and reference checks or interviews.		●
Board may terminate the process at any time.		●
Board may elect not to hire any candidate, instead appointing an interim president.		●

For example, the revised procedures specifically state that the district chancellor is solely responsible for ensuring the search's overall quality and compliance with board rules. According to the new procedures, it is the district chancellor's duty to initiate and supervise a nationwide search. Other revised procedures include the following:

- Develop a position announcement for president after seeking input from the college community. In the past, the board did not always explicitly require college community input in the wording of this announcement.

- Develop a recruitment and advertising plan, which may include the retention of a search consultant. In prior searches, the board merely required that recruitment be done nationally and as rapidly as possible, and the selection procedures did not directly address the possibility of hiring consultants.[2]

- Convene a presidential search committee by a board-determined deadline and ensure that the search is completed within a specified length of time. Prior procedures did not explicitly require the board to establish a timeline.

Although in the past the district performed many of the tasks detailed in the revised selection procedures, the fact that these tasks are now the explicit responsibility of the district chancellor means that the board and the public have someone to hold accountable for their completion. Moreover, by establishing a timeline for the search, the new selection procedures should ensure that a college will have a president as soon as possible.

In addition to addressing the issue of accountability, the revised procedures also attempt to increase communication between the various parties involved in a search. For instance, the new procedures require that both the board president and the district chancellor attend the search committee's first meeting and present their expectations about the search process and its goals. According to the district administrator, only the district chancellor or a designee would meet with the committee in the past. Including the board president in this meeting may increase the possibility that the search will produce candidates that the board considers qualified.

[2] However, the district did hire a search consultant in 1 of its 10 searches between 1994 and 1999.

The revised procedures also encourage the district to plan open meetings on campus to present the candidates to college employees, students, and residents of the community. While not requiring such meetings, the procedures suggest that these are good opportunities for the committee members to assess how well the candidates and college community will be able to work together and how effective the candidates will be at dealing with specific concerns at the college. The committee for the recent Harbor College search chose not to have an open meeting because, according to a district administrator, the dates available for possible meetings were after the end of the spring 2000 semester, when few people would be on campus, and the cost and effort of staging the meetings outweighed the benefits. However, we believe open meetings on campus are an important quality control, as well as an opportunity for more college community involvement, which we discuss later.

Although open meetings on campus in which the candidates and the college community get to know each other are encouraged under the revised procedures, they are not required.

Additional changes to the selection procedures concern the use of background and reference checks on candidates who are interviewed. Past procedures contained no written stipulations regarding these checks, but according to the district, such checks were made only after the search committee chose its finalists. According to the revised procedures, reference checks must now be made after the interviews with the committee but before the committee selects its finalists. Two of six committee members for the recent Mission College presidential search specifically noted this as an improvement, commenting that the opportunity to consider background and reference checks before selecting finalists provided information about the finalists not otherwise available to the committee. However, we did not note any instances in which any candidate was rejected on the basis of a background or reference check.

Five of these six committee members also voluntarily commented that the use of a search consultant is valuable to the district's ability to appoint a president. Although the district used a search consultant to assist in one past presidential selection process, the procedures at that time did not specifically address the issue. The revised selection procedures state that the district chancellor may retain a search consultant as part of his or her recruitment and advertising plan, although if choosing to do so, the district chancellor must recommend two or three potential consultants for final selection by the board. Following the new procedures, the district hired search consultants for the 2000 Mission and Harbor College selection processes. It has also hired a

consultant to assist in the recently initiated Southwest College search, although in this search, the board waived its own requirement to review two or three potential consultants, stating that it did not appear likely the board could identify a more qualified or more economical search firm to assist with the Southwest College search than the consultant it ultimately hired.

The five board members we specifically questioned about search consultants agreed that they are valuable to the selection process. They cited such reasons as a consultant's ability to solicit applications from a wide range of individuals, thus increasing the quality of the candidate pool, and his or her expertise in conducting candidate background and reference checks. However, using a consultant adds significant costs to the process, as we discuss later.

The Revised Procedures Also Increase Community Involvement

The revised procedures change the make-up of the selection committee by increasing the ratio of college community members to district appointees.

In addition to improving quality control, the revised procedures enhance even further the strong college community presence on the selection committee. As shown in Table 2, the revised procedures change the composition of the selection committee, proportionally increasing the influence of the college community.

Of a minimum of 12 voting committee members under the current procedures, the college community selects all but 3: a college president appointed by the district chancellor and 2 representatives from the residential community selected by the board. As shown in Table 2, under the past procedures, 6 of the 17 voting members were generally appointed by the board or the district chancellor.

The committee members we interviewed who were on both the 1999 and 2000 Mission College searches stated that both the past and current selection procedures allowed for sufficient input from the college community. However, one of these committee members who served on both the 1999 and 2000 Mission College search committees added that the more recent search committee reflected less control by the district and more control by the college community. In addition, according to a district administrator, the smaller committees can be established more quickly and make it easier to schedule meetings.

TABLE 2

Comparison of the District's Past and Revised Search Committees

	Voting Members Under Procedures Used Prior to September 1999	Voting Members Under Revised Procedures Used After September 1999
Appointed by:		
Board	1 committee chair	N/A*
	2 residential community representatives	2 residential community representatives
District chancellor	1 representative	N/A
	1 college president	1 college president
	1 nonunion academic administrator	N/A
Total number appointed by board or district chancellor:	6	3
Appointed by college community:		
Union employees	2 faculty members	2 faculty members
	1 nonacademic service employee	1 nonacademic service employee
	1 academic administrator	1 academic administrator
	1 college police officer	
		1 other representative(s) as may be required by collective bargaining agreements†
Associated student body organization	2 student representatives	1 student representative
College academic senate	2 faculty members	2 faculty members
Nonacademic managers	1 nonacademic management employee	N/A
Nonunion nonacademic employees	1 nonacademic nonmanagement employee	1 nonmanagement employee
Total number appointed by college community:	11	9
Total voting members on committee	17	12

* The board will designate one of the committee members to serve as committee chair.

† In the first two selection processes to use the revised procedures (Mission and Harbor Colleges, begun in 1999), the Police Officers Association selected a police officer.

The revised procedures have also increased involvement by the college and local communities in the selection process by encouraging open meetings on campus to present the candidates to district residents and college faculty, staff, and students. The committee members involved in the recent Mission College search chose to conduct open meetings, and five of the six committee members we interviewed commented favorably on their value. Specifically, one committee member stated that the use of an open forum to introduce the finalists to the community was "a big improvement" over the previous selection process at the college. Another member commented that the forum was an important part of the process because it gave the community an opportunity to meet the candidates and ask questions, it gave everyone a voice, and it reduced the possibility that people would come in after the fact to complain.

According to the five board members and the six Mission College search committee members whom we interviewed, the new selection procedures worked well.[3] The board and committee members particularly commented on the importance of greater community involvement, the necessity of strong quality controls, and the effectiveness of involving consultants in the process. By improving the selection process, the district has increased its ability to appoint presidents and may have enhanced public confidence in the selection process.

RECENT LITERATURE OFFERS RECOMMENDED PRACTICES FOR SELECTING COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

The recommended practices emphasize a cooperative relationship between the board and the stakeholders in the college and residential communities.

When the district was revising its presidential selection procedures in 1999, no available literature described recommended practices for selecting college presidents in the California community college system. However, in April 2000, the Community College League of California (league), a nonprofit public benefit corporation whose voluntary membership consists of the 72 local community college districts in California, produced a document entitled "CEO Search Information Packet" (information packet). This information packet describes recommended practices for the entire process of searching for and selecting chief executive officers (CEOs), including presidents, at community colleges. The information

[3] We did not ask Harbor College committee members about their process because that search had not been completed when we conducted our interviews.

packet emphasizes the need for a cooperative relationship between the board of trustees, which should control the search process, and the concerned stakeholders in the college community, who should provide broad and meaningful input to the process.

Recommended practices were reviewed by board members, chancellors, and other college administrators from community college districts throughout the State.

The specific purpose of the information packet is to assist community college districts in the search for a chancellor, who is the CEO of a community college district, but it also applies to the search for a president, who is the CEO of a college. We believe the procedures outlined by the league represent recommended practices because the information packet was reviewed by board members, chancellors, college presidents, and other college administrators from 21 single- and multi-campus community college districts located throughout the State. Since the league does not provide any fee-based consulting services relating to presidential searches, we believe it is likely to be unbiased and objective. The following sections describe the league's recommended practices.

Districts Should Define the Participants, Procedures, Budget, and Timeline

The first phase of the league's recommended practices in selecting a college president is to identify the various participants in the search process and define their roles, to establish the procedures they will use, and to set expectations about the budget and timeline for the process.

The league indicates that the board is generally responsible for overseeing the search process and for ensuring that the process includes broad and meaningful representation from concerned constituencies. However, the board of a multicollege district such as Los Angeles may delegate the responsibility to conduct the search to the district's chancellor. The league identifies the following as the board's (or its designee's) more specific initial responsibilities:

- At the beginning of the process, the board establishes and clearly communicates the responsibilities and authority of the search committee and consultant, if any. For example, a board may explicitly identify its right to consider one or more semifinalists whose names may not have been forwarded to it.

- The board also should be willing to allocate whatever funds are considered reasonable and necessary to secure the right person for the job. Costs generally include consultant fees, travel expenses, and advertising. A consultant, although optional to the search process, can bring to the process a knowledge of potential candidates and the expertise to manage any or all phases of the search process.

- The board generally establishes a timeline for completion of the process. The league recommends allotting six to eight months to recruit a substantive pool of applicants and to assess candidates. In most instances, this timeline should be sufficient to allow for a comprehensive search to hire the best person for the college.

The search committee should have an average of 10 to 14 members, who may represent faculty, administrators, classified staff, students, and representatives from the residential community. According to the league, if the board's direction to the committee is clear, there is little need to have board members on the committee. The committee's responsibilities are described in more detail later.

Districts Should Assess the College's Needs, Recruit Appropriate Candidates, and Select Finalists

The next step in the selection process is for the district to determine the qualities it desires in a president, recruit the best candidates for its specific needs, and narrow the field of candidates. The recommended practice is that the board perform a review of the campus to determine its specific needs, then work with the committee to develop a job announcement that summarizes the district's expectations concerning the qualifications of candidates. The announcement may also include descriptions of the duties and authority of the position, the application process, and the position's compensation.

The league emphasizes that the goal of recruiting is to develop a large and diverse pool of qualified applicants, which is generally accomplished most effectively through the active pursuit of the best candidates. Candidates should be solicited through announcements, advertising, and personal contacts. In addition, the district must guarantee confidentiality to potential candidates in order to protect their current positions

and personal goals. The recommended procedure is to have only the consultant, the selection committee chair, or the manager of the process receive and respond to inquiries and applications.

According to the recommended practices, if the candidate pool is not sufficiently diverse, more applications should be sought.

Once applications are received, those not meeting the basic qualifications described in the job announcement should be set aside while the committee evaluates the remaining pool to ensure that it has an adequate number of sufficiently diverse applications. If not, the search may be reopened and more applications sought. Using a rating system and the list of criteria in the announcement, the committee can narrow the candidate field to those who will be interviewed. Applicants who will not be considered further should be notified at this time.

According to the league, the traditional interview process should be expanded to include strategies such as a series of interviews with key people on campus, scenario exercises, and presentations on simulated problems. Following are the league's recommended goals for the evaluation process:

- To allow candidates to apply creative thinking to education and management philosophy.
- To ensure that all candidates go through the same evaluation process.
- To conduct background and reference checks after each candidate has visited with the committee.
- To make every effort to reach a consensus among committee members on at least three finalists whose names can be forwarded, in unranked order, to the board.

The Board Conducts a Final Evaluation and, if Necessary, Appoints an Interim President

Once the board receives the names of the three finalists decided upon by the search committee, the league's recommended practices call for the board to meet with the chair of the search committee and the consultant to hear a detailed presentation on the search process, including descriptions of candidates who were considered but rejected as finalists. According to the league, the board should then decide whether final interviews, additional meetings with the community, or visits to candidates'

current work sites might be helpful. Once the board has selected a candidate for the position, it can open negotiations regarding the final terms of the employment contract.

If the board finds that none of the recommended candidates is adequately qualified, it may be forced to appoint an interim president. A similar situation can occur when a president leaves suddenly, creating an unexpected vacancy. The league states that under these circumstances, it is generally wise not to appoint an interim president who could possibly be a candidate for the permanent position. Should it appoint an interim president with aspirations to the permanent position, the board risks subjecting itself to criticism that the selection of the new president was never genuinely open or fair. According to the league, most boards appoint interim presidents who are either senior administrators with no interest in the job or retired presidents with successful track records.

The 18 Community College Districts We Surveyed Are of Various Sizes and Geographically Dispersed in the State

District	Number of Colleges
Chabot-Las Pacitas	2
Coast	3
Contra Costa	3
Foothill-De Anza	2
Grossmont-Cuyamaca	2
Kern	3
North Orange County	2
Pasadena Area	1
Peralta	4
San Diego	4
San Francisco	1
San Jose-Evergreen	2
San Mateo	3
Santa Monica	1
South Orange County	2
State Center	2
Ventura County	3
West Valley-Mission	2

Some Districts We Surveyed Have Basic Procedures Similar to Those Recommended by the League

In addition to identifying the league's recommended practices, we surveyed 18 community college districts of various sizes located in the State, as shown in the box to the left, to determine the procedures they used to fill the position of college president. In some ways, the districts' selection procedures were very different: Although 8 of the 18 districts in our survey had standardized, written procedures, other districts either determined selection procedures on a search-by-search basis or relied on consultants to assist them. However, we found that while the amount of procedural detail varied substantially, many of the districts incorporated certain practices recommended by the league. Table 3 presents the results of our survey.

In three areas in particular, we noted strong similarities between the selection processes of the 18 districts and the league's recommended practices. First, all 18 districts in our survey reported allowing for community input from faculty, classified staff, and college administration into the process of selecting presidents for their colleges. Only one of the districts did not include students in the process, and only two did not include residents of the community college district.

TABLE 3

Survey Results of the Selection Procedures Used by 18 Districts

Question	Districts Responding "Yes"
Procedures	
Does your district have established procedures to select college presidents?	8
Community input	
Did your district provide for community input from:	
faculty, nonacademic staff, and administration?	18
students?	17
local employers and citizen groups?	6
residents of the district?	16
Search committees	
Did a committee of community representatives:	
develop minimum qualifications for the position?	11
develop desirable qualifications for the position?	14
develop an announcement for the position?	13
prescreen applications to ensure candidates meet minimum qualifications?	15
interview candidates?	18
select and forward a list of finalists to the chancellor or board?	18
Consultants	
Did your district hire a consultant to assist in the search?	12
Did the consultant assist with developing a recruiting announcement or brochure?	10
Did the consultant assist in determining where the announcement or brochure would be sent?	11
Did the consultant manage advertising for the position?	6
Did the consultant prescreen candidates for minimum qualifications?	3

Next, all 18 districts indicated they established search committees and had their committees interview qualified applicants. Eleven districts used their committees to develop minimum qualifications, but slightly more, 14, used their committees to develop desirable qualifications for the position. All 18 districts in our survey reported that they relied on the selection committee to select and forward the names of finalists for the position.

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Finally, 12 of the 18 districts used search consultants, primarily to assist in developing recruiting announcements or brochures and to determine where these would be sent. We noted that of the 10 districts that did not provide us or had not established formal, written selection procedures, 7 hired consultants to assist them in the search process.

New District Selection Procedures Reflect Recommended Practices

- Defines participants in the selection process, explains procedures, and establishes the timeline.
- Requires the chancellor to develop, with college community involvement, an announcement that includes minimum and desirable qualifications for the position.
- Calls for the chancellor to develop a recruiting and advertising plan, which may include the hiring of a search consultant.
- Requires that a well-balanced search committee pledged to maintaining the confidentiality of the process and representing various perspectives and backgrounds narrow the field of candidates by:
  - Reviewing all eligible applications, including those from an expanded pool, if necessary.
  - Interviewing not less than six candidates.
  - Considering the use of background and reference checks and open meetings to introduce candidates to college employees and members of the community.
  - Recommending at least three finalists to the chancellor, in unranked order, who forwards the list to the board with a recommendation, if any.
- The final evaluation is made by the board, which may conduct further background and reference checks or interviews, terminate the process, or elect to hire or not to hire any candidate.

ALTHOUGH THE DISTRICT'S REVISED SELECTION PROCEDURES GENERALLY MIRROR RECOMMENDED PRACTICES, SOME IMPROVEMENTS COULD BE MADE

In all significant areas, the Los Angeles district's revised procedures for selecting its college presidents mirror the league's recommended practices and are generally consistent with what other community college districts in our survey reported that they are doing. For example, like the districts we surveyed, the Los Angeles district has taken steps to show a commitment to community input in the process.

However, we noted several instances in which the district's revised procedures did not specifically include certain recommended practices that we believe the board should consider incorporating into its selection process. We also found a few other specific areas in which the district could improve its selection procedures.

The District's Revised Procedures Do Not Explicitly Include Some Recommended Practices

Areas in which the district might improve its selection process include the terms of the search consultant's contract, the overall search budget, and whether the board should be permitted to hire as interim president a possible candidate for the position.

Although the district opted to use a search consultant in the recent Mission and Harbor College searches, the contract between the district and its consultant was not entirely clear about the specific tasks to which the district and the consultant had

agreed. In one example, the contract called for the consultant to communicate with the board, but it did not specify the form or frequency of the communication. In fact, we found no written progress reports from the consultant. Although we have no indication of conflict between the district and the consultant over these contract provisions, more precise descriptions of deliverables in the future could forestall potential problems.

In addition, the board has not addressed the issue of establishing a search budget under the current procedures. The league's information packet recommends that prior to beginning a search, the board should decide what it believes to be appropriate expenditures for consultant services, advertising, interviews, and visits to candidates' home campuses. By setting spending expectations and limits, the board can communicate to the search committee how it believes search funds should be spent.

Finally, the district has no policy on hiring possible presidential candidates to serve as interim presidents. Feedback from certain board members indicated ambivalence concerning the issue. One board member considered an interim position as a "proving ground" for a candidate. Others felt that if an interim president was known to be favored by the board, other qualified candidates might not apply for the position. As we discussed earlier, the league's recommended practices suggest appointing an interim president who is not seeking the permanent position, such as a senior administrator with no interest in the position or a retired president with a successful track record.

We feel that it is important to note that the district's deviations from the league's recommended practices are relatively minor. However, by explicitly incorporating the aforementioned practices, the district can strengthen its currently adequate selection procedures.

The District's Revised Selection Procedures Do Not Adequately Address Certain Additional Issues

Although we found that the district had considerably improved its procedures for selecting college presidents, we did note certain problems that were not specifically addressed in the league's discussion of recommended practices for searches. These problems concerned the documentation of candidate evaluations and the extended use of interim presidents.

We found no evidence suggesting that candidates had been evaluated unfairly in the recent Mission and Harbor College searches. However, as we noted in past searches, in the 2000 Mission College search, the committee did not appropriately document its evaluation process. We were unable to determine what criteria the committee used to evaluate candidates it had interviewed. Although we saw interview questions, district staff responsible for conducting the process could not provide us with any summary of interview evaluations, nor evidence of whether the committee selected the finalists based solely on the interview questions or whether it used other criteria.

Documenting selection committee actions can demonstrate that the search process is fair and equitable.

We believe that the tasks a selection committee undertakes are important, not only to ensure that the most qualified individuals are selected as finalists, but also to demonstrate that the process was conducted in a fair and equitable manner. When there is no record of some of the procedures used in the selection process, the district may not be able to assure critics of the process that the selection was carried out in an appropriate manner. For this reason, we believe that it is important that search committees consolidate the scores of all candidates on a rating sheet and that they create a final listing of candidates based on specific criteria. Although this process is generally followed in district searches, requiring it and retaining evidence of the district's compliance as part of the selection procedures could ensure the fairness of future candidate evaluations. At least one district in our survey required that evaluations be documented in writing and submitted as part of the final committee report.

The other problem we noted concerned the district's extended use of interim presidents. According to the provisions in the California Code of Regulations, no interim appointment of a president may exceed one year in duration. This provision is designed to protect colleges against interim presidents who may prefer to assume caretaker, rather than leadership, roles and who may be reluctant to make long-term decisions. In addition, if the board appoints an interim president without receiving community input, actions taken by the interim president may have less community support.

The regulations allow the Chancellor of California Community Colleges to approve an extension of up to one year for interim appointments if a district demonstrates a pressing business need.

Interim presidents should generally not be in place for more than 12 months, yet the district has had four interim presidents whose terms ranged from 18 months to 4 years since August 1996.

However, despite the fact that in the last five years the district has had four interim presidents whose appointments exceeded the one-year limit, the district has not submitted any requests for extensions during this time. According to data provided to us by the district, Mission and Pierce Colleges had interim presidents for 25 months and 27 months, respectively, and Harbor College had an interim president for 18 months. The current president of Southwest College is also an interim president, a position she has been filling since August 1996.

The situation at Southwest College is clearly the most extreme. Although the district conducted a search to fill this position shortly after appointing the current interim president in 1996, the board's overall assessment was that, in view of the task at hand, none of the candidates' backgrounds and experience was a good fit. In a June 1997 letter to college faculty, staff, and students, the district chancellor stated that the district planned to do additional recruiting and that he hoped to have a new permanent president before the end of the 1997-98 academic year. However, it was not until June 2000 that the board directed the district to begin a new presidential selection process for Southwest College. According to a district administrator, the Southwest College search was delayed in part because the district was satisfied with the interim president and in part because of the searches taking place at Mission, Harbor, and Pierce Colleges. However, because the district did not begin its search for the presidents of any of the other three colleges until November 1998, we believe the district had sufficient time to conduct the Southwest College selection process between June 1997 and November 1998.

THE DISTRICT'S SEARCH COSTS HAVE INCREASED BUT ARE COMPARABLE TO THOSE OF OTHER DISTRICTS

The district's costs of selecting a president have risen significantly in the last year, from an average of $6,200 each for the searches ended in 1999 at Harbor, Pierce, and Mission Colleges to an average of almost $34,000 for the searches completed in 2000 at Harbor and Mission Colleges. The Harbor and Mission College searches, which were repeated because of the district's failure to appoint presidents in 1999, were more expensive in 2000 largely as the result of increased travel expenses and of the district's decision to hire search consultants. However, although the district's search costs increased, its expenses were still comparable to those of other districts performing similar searches.

Table 4 shows the district's costs for consulting services, travel, and advertising for searches ended in 1999 and 2000. Although the district was able to provide this information upon our request, it generally does not have a system to track the costs associated with each search.

TABLE 4

Presidential Search Costs

Selection Process	Search Consultant	Travel	Advertising	Totals
1999				
Harbor College	N/A*	$1,449	$2,224†	**$3,673**
Pierce College	N/A*	5,478	2,224†	**7,702**
Mission College	N/A*	4,298	2,933	**7,231**
2000				
Mission College	$20,000	10,879	5,342	**36,221**
Harbor College	20,000	7,483	4,248	**31,731**

Source: Los Angeles Community College District, Human Resources Division

* Not applicable because these selection processes did not use a search consultant.

† The district consolidated its advertising for the 1999 Harbor and Pierce College selection processes concluded in 1999. We have divided the total cost of $4,448 equally between the two searches.

As the table indicates, the use of a consultant caused a major difference between the search costs in 1999 and those in 2000. In both of the more recent Mission and Harbor College searches, the district paid a consultant fee of $20,000. Although this represents a significant increase in the district's overall search costs, the fees are comparable to those paid by other districts for consulting services. According to our survey of 18 community college districts, those reporting that they used consultants paid between $4,500 and $35,000 in consultant fees during presidential searches. One district reported it had negotiated a "good deal," paying only $4,500 to a consultant who, although experienced, had just started his own company. At the high end of those surveyed, one district estimated it had paid $35,000 to a consultant, but this included travel costs, which the district was unable to separate from the base fee.

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Overall, we found that of the 12 districts that used a consultant, 6 paid in the range of $12,500 to $24,000, plus expenses. In comparison to these figures, the Los Angeles district's costs appear reasonable. Moreover, the district selection committee and board members with whom we spoke largely agreed that the services a search consultant provides are worth the expense, particularly because they increase the quality of the candidate pool and thus make it more likely that the search will be successful.

Other major search costs were travel and advertising. While district reimbursements to candidates for their travel, accommodation, and meal expenses incurred for interviews and appearances at community forums have increased as the result of more active recruiting, the district's advertising costs did not increase significantly from 1999 to 2000. For the three presidential searches ended in 1999, combined travel and advertising costs totaled $18,606, or an average of $6,202 per selection process. In the two searches completed in 2000, more candidates from outside the local area were interviewed and as a result, combined travel and advertising costs increased to $27,952, or an average of $13,976 per selection process.

The other significant cost to the search is the value of the time spent by the 17 search committee members away from their normally assigned duties. For instance, one committee member reported spending more than 50 hours over a period of several months on the 1999 Harbor College search process. However, since the district did not track these hours or quantify this cost, we were unable to consider this expense in our budget analysis.

When the board rejects finalists recommended by the search committee, the district must undertake the costly search process again.

Although the district's costs to conduct a search are not unusual, the increased expenses associated with the selection process make it all the more critical that the district be able to appoint a president after a search. If the district is unable to appoint a president, it must undertake the search process again and incur additional costs, as it did in 1999 and 2000 for Mission and Harbor Colleges. For example, after spending $7,231 for the Mission College search in 1999, the district spent another $36,221 in 2000 before the college finally appointed a president.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The district should take the following actions to improve the procedures it uses to select college presidents:

- Consider adopting those league-recommended practices that it is not currently using, such as establishing a budget for each search.

- Consider making open meetings on campus a standard practice in the search process unless the search committee has compelling reasons why such meetings should not be held.

- Ensure that contracts with search consultants include a detailed statement of work, and consider including a requirement for consultants to provide periodic written status reports to either the chancellor or the board so that the district can gauge their progress and value.

- Archive search documents to demonstrate the district's compliance with all required procedures and to memorialize the process for subsequent searches.

- Perform selection procedures promptly to avoid having interim presidents serve longer than the California Code of Regulations allows. If the district cannot meet this timeline, it should request a waiver from the Chancellor of California Community Colleges, demonstrating that it has a pressing business need to continue operating with an interim president.

- Develop procedures for selecting interim presidents and submit them to the board for approval. Also, the district should consider whether appointing an interim president who may apply for the position is appropriate.

- Develop a system to separately track all costs associated with each presidential search. This will allow the district to determine whether costs are reasonable and to budget appropriately for future searches.

We conducted this review under the authority vested in the California State Auditor by Section 8543 et seq. of the California Government Code and according to generally accepted government auditing standards. We limited our review to those areas specified in the audit scope section of this report.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine M. Howle

ELAINE M. HOWLE
State Auditor

Date: August 29, 2000

Staff: Lois Benson, Audit Principal, CPA
Arn Gittleman, CPA
Tommy Wong

Agency's comments provided as text only.

Los Angeles Community Colleges
770 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90017

August 15, 2000

Mary P. Noble
Acting State Auditor
555 Capitol Mall, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Noble:

We have reviewed the draft of your report entitled "Los Angeles Community College District: Has Improved Its Procedures for Selecting College Presidents." We believe the report is generally accurate, and that the recommendations it contains are reasonable.

Thank you for providing us with an opportunity to review and make comments on the report.

Sincerely,

(Signed by: Mark Drummond)

Mark Drummond
Chancellor

cc: Members of the Legislature
Office of the Lieutenant Governor
Milton Marks Commission on California State
Government Organization and Economy
Department of Finance
Attorney General
State Controller
State Treasurer
Legislative Analyst
Senate Office of Research
California Research Bureau
Capitol Press